

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS

No. 1037. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1888.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

So Madge's confession remained unspoken; she fixed the date of her wedding-day instead. She caught up the burthen of Miss Shore's song, and said: "It is fate, my lips must be sealed eternally now." And she set herself to stifle the voice of her conscience, to banish every thought but the one that Lance so far was saved, and to look ahead at naught but the dangers which had yet to be faced and conquered for his sake.

Sir Peter did not say it was Fate, but went about telling everybody that "if it had not been for me these young people would have made a nice mess of their love affairs; one would have been off to Africa, and the other to goodness only knew where."

He surpassed himself in activity during the week following the announcement of the engagement. Nothing went fast enough to please him. One way or another he anticipated everything that had to be done in the way of business arrangements. The estate to be purchased for Lance must not be allowed to come into the market, so his solicitors were commissioned to negotiate for it privately. Before, however, they had had time to despatch one offer for the property, Sir Peter had sent off no less than three. And so on throughout the transaction. The price of the estate went up proportionately.

He pushed forward the date of the wedding-day in much the same fashion.

A three weeks' engagement was the utmost he would hear of. "Why you've been engaged from childhood, and ought to have been married ages ago," he said, anticipating any possible demur Madge might make, and skipping lightly over the Cohen episode in her history.

Lady Judith thought the hurried manner in which the wedding was arranged typical of Sir Peter's general method of conducting affairs, and off and on she had a good deal to say about it.

On the whole, the two persons most deeply interested said the least.

Lance a little listlessly accepted the fact, telling himself a hundred times a day how grateful he was to Madge for her love, and that to the end of his days his one aim would be to put as much happiness as possible into her life.

But of love-making, so far as he was concerned, there was not one jot.

Miss Shore's name never passed his lips, and it was quickly evident to Madge that they two would have to begin their life together with a sealed subject between them.

As the days went by that sealed subject seemed to her less like a sepulchre, with a stone decently rolled to its mouth, than an open grave whose proper occupant wandered at will, a restless shade, among the scenes and people to which it was supposed to have said good-bye.

If, when they sat side by side, a sudden silence fell upon him, Madge would say to herself, "He is thinking of that girl in grey, wondering over the mystery of her life, and what sudden terror drove her to her death."

Or if, in the course of conversation, he gave an absent answer, or let his gaze rest longer than usual on her face,

she would think bitterly : " He is comparing the beauty of that girl with my sallow face. Oh, Madge Cohen, what have you beyond your wealth to give him ? "

Her thoughts travelled back to the bright summer's afternoon when, as she and Lance stood facing each other in the sunlight, the chill, cold shadow of that desolate girl had seemed to fall between them. Well, she might be buried six feet below the earth in her pauper's coffin, but she had left her shadow behind her ; Madge might lock up easels and ball-dress, and change her room a hundred times over, but all the same the shadow was there.

As the days went by, Madge, instead of rallying from her short, sharp illness, grew whiter and thinner. Cold weather setting in at the beginning of September, brought with it for her a series of severe colds; whereupon, the old doctor once more lifted up a warning voice, advising that his patient should get away to the south before the Cumbrian mists and east winds set in continuously ; in fact, as soon as possible, or he would not answer for the consequences.

Sir Peter would have liked the wedding to be not as soon as, but sooner than possible. He redoubled energy over the business arrangements. Letter-writing became far too slow a process for him now, he took to telegraphing two or three times a day to his lawyers, also to the trustees of the property for which he was negotiating.

This property was in Durham, and promised to yield a good income if judiciously managed in connection with the Redesdale estate ; it occurred to Sir Peter that it might expedite matters if Lance, in person, were to survey the property and discuss matters generally with the trustees of the estate, and the land-steward of Redesdale.

Then he took Madge vigorously in hand, and just as in the old days he had hurried her into her marriage with old David Cohen, so now he hastened forward her wedding-day by another seven days.

One of Lady Brabazon's sons was to be married only the morning before the day now fixed for Lance's and Madge's wedding. Lance was to act as his best man. It was therefore arranged that Lance should go straight from Durham to this wedding, which was to take place at York ; spend the night of that day with the Brabazons, coming back to Upton in the morning to receive his bride from Sir Peter's hands at Saint Cuthbert's church.

Lance did not throw much spirit into the part of "best man," which he was to perform for his friend. He characterised the Brabazon wedding as a headstrong, foolish affair. On the day on which he set off for Durham, Madge rose at six o'clock in the morning to have breakfast with him, and to "see him off." He spoke his mind freely to her about his friend's "infatuation" as he called it, and vowed that if the choice had been given him he would sooner have followed Eric Brabazon to his grave ; "a man had far better lie down in his coffin than make such a marriage as that."

Madge knew the history of Eric Brabazon's courtship ; the lady of his choice had as good as jilted him, but friends had interfered and the wedding had eventually been arranged.

Madge was standing outside in the bright morning sunshine caressing Lance's horses as he said this. She had been saying soft, sweet things to him with her good-byes, wondering whether the Redesdale fishing was as good as that at Upton, whether the stables there would need enlarging and so forth ; when, however, he spoke of choosing rather to follow Eric Brabazon to the grave than go to his wedding, her soft speeches came to a halt. She bent her face till her curly brown hair seemed one with the horse's mane. "He may be happy, he may make up his mind to forget the past," she said, in a low voice.

"What, forget lies and deceit?" Lance cried, hotly.

"And it doesn't follow because she has deceived him once that she will attempt to do so a second time," she continued after a moment's pause.

"If I had been in Eric's place I wouldn't have given her a chance. The first deliberate piece of deception would have put an eternal barrier between us," said Lance, vehemently.

Madge felt herself frozen into silence. She walked with him to the park gates, the groom following slowly with the dog-cart ; but she had no more sweet speeches to make.

"An eternal barrier, an eternal barrier," her thoughts kept repeating. She watched him drive away down the steep road, shading her eyes with her hand to catch a last glimpse of him. He waved his hat in farewell, then his hand ; then a bend in the road hid him from her sight.

"When next we meet it will be before

the altar rails of Saint Cuthbert's," she said to herself, but with none of that rush of joy in her heart which the words might be supposed to bring with them. "Would it be so if I had spoken out the truth and told him what I have done for his sake?"

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Mr. Stubbs's voice at that moment. "I saw you walking through the park with Mr. Clive; and, as I particularly wanted to speak to you, I ventured to follow."

Madge was startled; this man, like an emissary of darkness, seemed perpetually hovering over her path.

"What is it?" she asked, coldly. "Will it take long to tell?"

"There is nothing specially to tell, madam, it is merely a suggestion I have to make; it can be made easily enough as we walk back to the house together."

That "we" was a perpetual torture to Madge. It seemed the outward and visible sign of the evil bond between her and this man. She never heard it without feeling as she felt on the day when old David Cohen clasped her first diamond necklace round her throat.

Nevertheless, she did not refuse Mr. Stubbs's company on her way back through the park, nor did she attempt to cut his communications short, for her steps slackened as they neared the house.

Mr. Stubbs's last words as they parted at the front door were:

"Everything is going on satisfactorily, madam; just exactly as we could wish."

To this Madge made a sharp impatient movement with her hand.

"And the second letter, of which you spoke just now, gives me no anxiety whatever. If allusion is made to it when the Rev. Mr. Parker arrives, I simply say I read it to Sir Peter with some half-dozen others of a similar kind—there are always a lot of people writing to make or to break appointments with him, and half the letters of that sort which I read to him he pays no attention to—he is either walking about the room, or thinking of something else. The first letter also is now a very simple affair, and the sooner it is in my hands the better, for really there is no time to be lost."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE or two things happened during Lance's stay in Durham.

Madge suddenly grew what the French call "*dévote*." She developed a fondness for

saints' days and early services. Saint Cuthbert's old church, off and on, saw a good deal of her just then.

Her friends in the neighbourhood shared with Saint Cuthbert's church the honour of her society, for she balanced her devotion in the early part of the day with an increase of gaiety towards its close. She accepted every invitation to entertainments given in honour of her approaching marriage; seemed to enter warmly into the local enthusiasm that was growing on the matter, and talked freely of the preliminary arrangements which were being made for the wedding.

Once, however, when so chatting with Lottie Brabazon, she was suddenly frozen into silence by a remark made by that light-hearted young lady.

It was:

"Of course you will be married in grey—it's the only colour widows can wear."

Madge felt that she would as soon be married in her shroud as have to face Lance at the altar in grey garments.

Something else noteworthy occurred while Lance was away inspecting the Durham property. A sudden remarkable increase of intimacy seemed to spring up between Mrs. Cohen and Mr. Stubbs, and they were frequently to be seen in each other's company. Sir Peter noted the fact, and rubbed his hands over it with delight.

"Capital fellow that!" he said to Madge. "I'm glad to see you appreciate him. I think I've an eye for character, although Lady Judith, at first, hadn't a good word to say for him. Now, if you could get just such a man as that for your land steward at Redesdale, he'd double the value of your property in less than ten years."

Madge, standing with her back to the light, and speaking in a hurried voice, gave an answer which almost took Sir Peter's breath away.

"I was thinking of pensioning off the present steward at Redesdale. He's very old and not very active—and I was wondering if—if you thought—if you would like, I mean—Mr. Stubbs to take the post. I mean if you were thinking of getting a new secretary, Mr. Stubbs might like to undertake the steward's duties at Redesdale."

She had stammered a great deal over this speech. In truth, it was a speech not easy to make gracefully.

Sir Peter was fairly taken aback. "My dear child, my dear child!" was all he

could say at first. Then he walked up and down the room once or twice very fast. Then he stood still in front of her, and tipped and lifted his eyebrows at her till she felt quite giddy.

"I wasn't thinking of making a change, Madge," he said; "but now you speak of it, I think Stubbs is exactly the man for the post you could give him. He's getting on in life—a younger man could write my letters and do all I should require. His remuneration as your steward would be twice what I give him as secretary. He would have a nice house, servants, and horses of his own. Yes, capital idea! I won't stand in his light. Think it over! No, there's no need to do that. Consider it settled, my dear. I'm delighted."

After this arrangement was made it was only natural that Mr. Stubbs and Madge should be still more in each other's society. It seemed reasonable to suppose that there were many matters in connection with the stewardship at Redesdale that required discussion and arrangement.

Thanks to Sir Peter's telegrams and the general energy which he displayed on the matter, the purchase of the Durham property and the deeds conveying it to Lance, were much less lengthy businesses than such things generally are. Two days after Lance's departure to Durham, and three before the day fixed for the wedding, saw the purchase as good as concluded by the payment of an instalment of the purchase-money by Sir Peter to seal the bargain. Final legal forms it was arranged should be gone through on Lance's return with Madge from their wedding-tour.

"And they talk about the interminable length of law processes," said Sir Peter, triumphantly, to Mr. Stubbs. "Why, how long have we had this matter in hand, eh? Park, woods, river, farms, in all about one thousand eight hundred acres; rent-roll about five thousand a year; and we've as good as pulled it through in three weeks' time! Now we've just a few telegrams to send off this morning to the Durham people, and then we'll set to work on the day's correspondence."

If Mr. Stubbs had had two pairs of hands, one for the day's telegrams, the other for its letters, he might have been able to satisfy the demands of Sir Peter's energy. As it was, long before the telegrams were despatched, Sir Peter was asking the question, "Anything of importance to-day, Stubbs?" and had begun his usual quick-march which betokened that

replies were ready to ooze out of his fingers' tips.

Mr. Stubbs laid aside his telegrams and read in succession one or two unimportant letters which the morning's post had brought. Then he laid his hand upon a packet of three letters, and his face grew long and serious.

"These, Sir Peter," he said, "I grieve to tell you were, by Mr. Clive's orders, placed on one side unopened in an inner compartment of your writing-table, and I am sorry to say have been forgotten. If you remember when you had the—"

"When I was ill," interrupted Sir Peter. Of late he had grown sensitive on the score of the juvenile ailment, and had repudiated it, asserting that Broughton had made a mistake, and that it had been nothing but nettle-rash after all.

Mr. Stubbs bowed. "When you were ill, Sir Peter, if you remember, for one day Mr. Clive undertook your correspondence. He dictated a general answer to a few letters, and told me to put the rest on one side, as no doubt they'd answer themselves if let alone."

"Just like him! Read them out, Stubbs."

"I'm sorry to say afterwards they were forgotten."

"Ah, Madge, I remember, undertook my correspondence the next day—so she forgot them, eh?"

"I fear I must own to the neglect, Sir Peter. Mrs. Cohen attended to everything that I put before her."

"Ah, well, open and read them; I don't suppose it matters much."

The first letter opened and read was the prospectus of a mining company in the adjoining county. It had no date attached. It received a scanty attention, and was forthwith tossed into the waste-paper basket.

The second letter shared a similar fate. It was an intimation from a brewing firm that they were about to convert themselves into a chartered company. There was no date to this communication also.

The third letter Mr. Stubbs opened with a little preamble.

"It has an Australian postmark. I trust its contents did not require immediate acknowledgement," he said, in a concerned voice.

And then he began to read the story of Gervase Critchett, as told by the Rev. Joshua Parker.

But long before he had got half-way

through it, Sir Peter had cried to him in a hoarse voice : "Stop! Stop! For Heaven's sake, stop!" and had got up from his seat, and had taken the letter into his own hands to read.

His hands, however, trembled so violently that he was perforce obliged to spread the paper before him on the table. And then there had come a mist before his eyes, so that the lines danced backwards and forwards, and reading became an impossibility, so he handed the letter back to Mr. Stubbs.

"Go on," he said. "Read quickly."

He leaned back in his chair for a good five minutes, still and silent, his brain possibly overweighted, not only by the startling news that letter brought, but by the memories of years long gone-by, which the startling news conjured up from the land of shadows.

But that five minutes at an end, Sir Peter was himself again. He jumped up from his chair, seized the Australian letter, and rang the bell violently.

"Ask Lady Judith to come here to me at once—important news," was the order he gave to the servant who answered his summons. "And—and Mrs. Cohen also."

And then as soon as the servant had disappeared, he rang the bell again to countermand the order. Four walls couldn't contain him at that moment, and before the servant could answer his second summons, he had set off to scour the house and grounds in search of Lady Judith and Madge.

Lady Judith, in her morning-room, studying with deep interest a catalogue of patent farming appliances, was suddenly startled by having the price-list shut out from her view by a letter in strange handwriting spread athwart it by Sir Peter.

"Read it," he shouted into her ear, "and tell me what you think of it."

Before, however, she had time to realise the fact that it was something other than a written recommendation of the barrel churns which she was contemplating so lovingly in her picture-catalogue, Sir Peter had disappeared through the window, having caught sight of Madge coming up the drive towards the house.

Madge was wrapped in furs, and had on the thickest of Shetland veils; she had complained a good deal of the cold of late, and had taken to muffling herself up as if it were mid-winter. When Sir Peter had breathlessly told his startling news, she had a sharp fit of coughing which for the

moment prevented her making any comment thereon, and Sir Peter, while executing a quick-march up and down the gravel path, discoursed upon Gervase, his manners and doings from boyhood upwards.

"A handsome fellow he was! My poor mother used to say whenever I put her out that it was a thousand pities Gervase hadn't come into the world first, he would have carried the title with so much more dignity than I should. Poor Gervase! Poor Gervase! I remember he had a good opinion of himself—never would take advice—restless, too, he was—always wanting to do half-a-dozen things at once—used to have a hundred and one schemes in hand at the same moment, but never brought any of them to maturity! Poor Gervase, a sad ending! I wonder if his boy is like him in any way!"

By the time he had got to Gervase's boy Madge had recovered her voice, and was ready to ask a few questions.

"What will you do about the boy—send for him, I suppose?" was the first.

"Of course, of course; what else in life could I do? I shall telegraph to him this very day, sending the message from 'your uncle at Upton.' Poor little lad! And he's in a state of anxiety for fear we shouldn't give him a welcome! Gervase's only boy not to feel sure of a welcome! Thank Heaven for the cablegram, Madge. Fancy that poor boy having to wait three months for the news that his father's people would hold out their hand to him! And that letter already has been most unfortunately delayed. Ah, you don't know about that—never mind, I haven't time to tell you now!" Here Sir Peter in a great hurry pulled out his watch. "Haven't a minute to spare, Madge, I'm off at once to Durham to tell Lance the good news. You explain everything to Lady Judith. I shall just save a train at Lower Upton if I'm quick about it."

Madge demurred vigorously to his hot haste to carry his news everywhere. She felt that her lips—by right of her love and sacrifice for him—should have been the ones to tell this tale to Lance.

But Sir Peter was resolute, and Madge had to realise the truth of Lance's saying, that "if once Uncle Peter took a thing into his head, not the Lords, nor the Commons, nor the whole bench of Bishops combined could get it out."

Lance was seated in his quiet little

country inn writing a few lines to Madge, when the startling announcement was made to him that Sir Peter was below waiting to see him.

Lance had arranged to be at York on the morrow, in order to be present at Eric Brabazon's wedding. He had spent the day in taking a final survey of his newly acquired property, planning alterations and improvements.

From the window where he sat, writing his letter to Madge, he could see the exact point where his estate met the Redesdale land. Redesdale itself, with its park, woods, and meadows, formed the larger portion of the landscape of which the window commanded a view. Between the trees he could catch a glimpse of the house: a handsome, modern structure of palatial dimensions.

Most men in Lance's position, with such a prospect as this facing them, would have owned to thoughts of a decidedly roseate hue.

"All to be mine so soon, and a loving wife into the bargain! And youth and health mine also! Lance Clive, you're a lucky fellow!" If thoughts such as these, with a touch of pride and triumph in them, had found expression in the letter he was penning, it might have been pardoned him.

There was, however, no necessity to plead extenuating circumstances for the letter that lay before him. It was soberly worded to the last degree; the sort of letter which a brother might have written to a loving sister with an eye to its perusal by the whole family afterwards.

And, soberly worded though it was, once or twice his pen had slackened in its task, and his left hand had pressed his eyes as if to shut out a vision, which night and day seemed ever before them—a vision of a girl, with wan, white face, waving a farewell to him from out a shadowy darkness, while her lips, as if in mockery of the farewell she waved, bade him—

"Go back and dance."

The announcement of Sir Peter's arrival sent his thoughts running in all sorts of channels; something must have happened. Illness? Death? His fears flew to the worst.

But Sir Peter's beaming face reassured him quickly enough, and the old gentleman had not been five minutes in the room before the story of the two Gervases had been begun and ended.

Lance listened in silent astonishment.

Many a time when the story of Gervase Critchett's erratic ways had been told him, he had felt disposed to envy the man his life of adventure in spite of the ill-luck which had seemed to attend it. Now the awfulness of the ending of that life—the hopelessness and desperation of the man, with death facing him and those dearest to him—was the thing that touched him most.

"He must have died a thousand times over that night," he said, pitifully, and then there fell a silence between the two which Sir Peter broke by forcing a cheerful voice, and reading over again the story of Gervase Critchett, the younger.

Then other thoughts began to come to Lance. He rose from his chair, and laid his hand on Sir Peter's shoulder.

"Uncle Peter," he said, gravely, "the estate you have been buying for me is so much robbery to Gervase—it must be his, not mine."

Sir Peter's amazement was boundless. Such a notion as this had not for a moment entered his brain. It took him a long time to grasp it.

That he might do what he liked with his own, he had enough and to spare for Gervase, was the first argument where-with he endeavoured to rebut it; an argument, however, which fell pointless before Lance's vigorous reasoning on the matter.

Lance, to his own fancy, stood pictured as an interloper who had somehow crept up the back-stairs to good luck, while the one who had the right to enter to it by the front-door had been barred out in the cold.

"Poor boy; poor little fellow," he said, "to be knocking about in the world in that way, and a stranger here to step into his rights!"

Sir Peter tried his hardest to make him see the matter in another light. But logic had never been Sir Peter's strong point. His arguments were mostly interjections, spoken now at Lance's elbow, anon at the further end of the room.

The sun went down, the moon rose; the inmates of the quiet little inn put out their lights and went to bed; but still Lance and Sir Peter talked on, Lance getting firmer in his reasoning, Sir Peter's interjections gaining in vehemence and intensity.

"My dear boy, my dear boy," he had said over and over again, "I have brought you up to no profession. It would be like

sending a soldier out to battle without weapons, to turn you out into the world to get your own living."

To which Lance replied, also over and over again :

"I have a head and I have hands; if I can't use one I can use the other; and no man with both at command can be said to be without weapons."

At last, one of Sir Peter's interjections struck a key-note not to be silenced by argument. It was :

"The tie between you and me, my boy, is as strong as any of blood could be."

Lance faltered a little at this.

"If you don't choose to be looked upon as my eldest son, take the place of second and best loved," Sir Peter went on, seeing what words of his had told most.

Whereupon Lance felt himself driven farther back in the field.

Finally, and this was when the night had nearly ended and both men were a little wearied with the strain of feeling they had undergone, Sir Peter brought out three words :

"Think of Madge!"

And then Lance, paraphrasing the words somewhat thus: "If you refuse this property, how dare you, a pauper, offer marriage to Madge with her wealth?" struck his colours and gave up the contest, on the condition that Sir Peter would commission his solicitors to settle the estate on him for life only, and that on his death it was to revert to Gervase and his heirs.

CAPTAIN SPENCER'S CARD-CASE

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

DAVID ROBERTS was a Welshman, and he had a thriving business as a watchmaker and jeweller in the flourishing English provincial town of Moortown. He was a man of long experience in his trade, and besides mechanical skill, possessed considerable taste; so the great people of the neighbourhood were accustomed to patronise his shop, and secretly congratulated themselves on being there able to purchase articles quite as pretty as any they would have found in Bond Street, at a much more reasonable price. It was not that David habitually kept a large stock of valuable gems; but he exhibited a very fair display of the more ordinary articles of luxury, and in addition dealt in old china and old coins of a choice kind,

which brought additional grist to his mill.

David was a little, pugnacious, black-eyed Welshman, with a vastly good opinion of himself, particularly as regarded his own acuteness and sagacity. Although engaged in a trade which, more than any other, is the peculiar hunting-ground of rogues, it was his proud boast that he had never once been robbed or defrauded. He laughed scornfully at other less fortunate rivals who allowed themselves to be fleeced, and was confident that no swindler alive was cunning enough to induce him to take a worthless cheque in payment for valuable articles, or divert his attention in order to escape with a tray of watches into the street.

"I can take a man's measure at a glance," he was wont to exclaim grandiloquently. "I don't believe there's a rogue alive who could rob me! Several have tried, but they've only made things very unpleasant for themselves, without my being one penny the worse!"

David was a bachelor, and confirmed woman-hater, so his natural self-esteem had never been lessened by hearing a few uncomplimentary truths now and then from his better-half. He had only one meek little assistant, who deferred to him in everything, and entirely acquiesced in his employer's estimate of himself. Any stranger who entered the shop had to run the gauntlet of the proprietor's inquisitive black eyes, for he made a point of being always there; and if the new-comer had no legitimate errand, woe betide him. Mr. Roberts showed him to the door in double-quick time.

One fine afternoon in early summer, David was standing with his usual complacency behind his counter, when a well-dressed young man entered, and asked to look at some diamond rings. David promptly fetched some, piercing the stranger with an eye like a gimlet as he examined first one, and then another, and also keeping a sharp look-out for any confederate who might be lurking outside, waiting his opportunity to snatch a handful of jewellery. But the customer was evidently a peaceable and well-disposed member of the community, who finally decided upon a ring of the value of ten pounds, and in payment laid a Bank of England note for twenty pounds on the counter, with a request for change.

By this time reassured as to the honesty of the stranger's intentions, Mr. Roberts

counted ten sovereigns into his palm, and when he had gone, locked the note up in his cash-box with complacency, after having duly taken the number. He was not so lucky as to dispose of rings worth ten pounds every day, and he congratulated himself accordingly. The next morning, as the jeweller was making entries in his ledger, he was disturbed by a hearty voice saying :

" I say, mate, have you got any pretty gimcracks for a fellow to give to his sweetheart ? "

The new-comer had a decidedly nautical air, and his garb also proclaimed him a seafaring man. Mr. Roberts, according to custom, took his measure at a glance, and then asked him what he would like.

" Let's have a look at some gold brooches, mate. My old uncle's died and left me all his money, and I mean to treat my Polly to something handsome for once."

The jeweller brought out a tray of gold ornaments from the window, from which the young sailor, after some hesitation, selected a gold arrow, of which the price was one pound. To pay for it he produced a Bank of England note for five pounds from a sealskin pouch, and was just having the change counted out to him, when there was a sound outside as of a hastily driven vehicle stopping at the door, and a tall, dark man of about six-and-twenty, with a determined aspect, rushed in, and, without a word, seized the sailor by the arm as he was about to leave the shop.

" Just in time ! " he exclaimed, exultantly. " I've been one too many for you this time, my man, although you contrived to fool me so cleverly more than once before ! What, you want to escape, do you ? Wait a bit ! "

With marvellous quickness and dexterity he produced a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped them on the wrists of his captive. Then, turning to Mr. Roberts, who for once could only stare in amazement, without any of his usual sang-froid, he asked :

" What has this rascal been buying ? "

" A gold brooch."

" And he paid for it with a five pound note, didn't he, No. 11,889 ? "

The jeweller in surprise looked into his cash-box, and admitted the correctness of the number.

" And have you sold anything else lately to strangers who paid in Bank of England notes ? " continued his questioner. " I'm

a detective, in pursuit of the perpetrators of a daring robbery of notes which lately occurred at a bank in Birmingham. Two men in broad daylight snatched them before the very eyes of the cashier, who fortunately had taken the numbers. This fellow is one of the scoundrels."

" I had a man here yesterday, who bought a diamond ring for ten pounds and gave me a note for twenty, " said the jeweller, going to his safe to fetch it.

" Note No. 54,627 ? " asked the detective, consulting his note-book.

" Yes, " said David, handing him the note to examine at his leisure.

" Then we have caught one of the scoundrels, and the other is probably not far off. Some of the stolen property has already been recovered. Will you let me have these two notes to produce to the magistrates in court ? The Bench is sitting now, and I've got a cab at the door ready to go to the police station at once with this fine fellow. Of course we shall require you as a witness. Time's precious, so I must be off ; but if you'll come round to the Town Hall as soon as you can, I'll meet you there, and see that the case is heard with as little delay as possible. I'm sure you'll be glad to assist in bringing such a rogue to justice."

Tightly clutching his captive, the detective had bundled him into the vehicle before the jeweller had time to collect his senses, and in a moment the cab was out of sight. Mr. Roberts, indignant at having been made the unconscious receiver of stolen bank-notes, merely stayed to lock up the safe, and call his assistant from the work-room at the back to mind the shop, and set off at a run for the Town Hall, which was distant about half a mile. A few idle men were lounging about the door, as was usual when the borough magistrates were sitting ; and hurrying into the stone-paved lobby, David accosted the first person he met, who happened to be the superintendent of the local police.

" Have they come ? " he eagerly asked.

" Have who come ? "

" The detective with the man who has been passing notes stolen from a bank at Birmingham."

" I don't understand, " said the other, looking at the little Welshman in amazement. " There's been no such case reported here yet, and I've been here all the morning. There's only one charge of fowl-stealing to be heard now, and that's all for to-day."

"But the detective said he was coming on here at once, and I must attend as a witness," urged the jeweller, as he went to the door and looked eagerly up and down the street for the cab. He stood at that door for a long time, but in vain. Neither detective nor prisoner ever appeared again. At last, when the unhappy little man could no longer doubt that he—he, the astute, the clear-sighted David Roberts—had been cleverly swindled by three adroit rogues out of a gold brooch, a diamond ring, and thirty-nine pounds in hard cash, he sat down and cursed the day he was born. He had fallen into a trap which, when he thought over it afterwards, seemed too transparent to deceive a child; and worse even than the serious pecuniary loss, was the bitter reflection that he had been deceived at last.

He circulated through the medium of the police a description of the scoundrels, especially of the sham detective who was evidently the instigator and prime mover in the whole affair; and went back to his shop, a sadder and a wiser man. Although pride withheld him from publicly disclosing the fraud of which he had been the victim, the secret was not long in leaking out in a provincial town, where everybody knew everybody else's business; and the ironical condolence or open exultation of his neighbours over the man who had so often boasted of his penetration, being himself taken in at last, drove him to the verge of frenzy. At the same time this treatment gave additional strength to his resolution, that if ever he met any of the swindlers again, he would spare no pains or expense in bringing them to justice. He felt certain that he would be able to identify them, for his memory for faces was very good.

CHAPTER II.

"I DECLARE, Spencer, you're the most careless fellow on the face of the earth!" remarked Captain Dalrymple, half-seriously, half-banteringly, to his friend and comrade Godfrey Spencer, as the two young men strolled along the promenade of the important naval station and garrison town of Mudport. "You're always losing something, or forgetting something, or getting taken in by somebody, or—"

"Don't row at me, Dalrymple, just because I don't happen to be as orderly and precise as you are," returned the other, a handsome young fellow, with a pair of mis-

chievous brown eyes. "I can't help being naturally untidy and lazy. I would if I could. And after all, what does it signify losing a trumpery card-case? The old thing wasn't worth five shillings. Though I grant it was annoying to have no card to leave on the new people at the Dockyard, after hunting all my pockets through twice for my case, until I looked like a fool. But it's just my luck."

And he began softly to hum a tune, as though he wished to change the subject.

"Just your carelessness, you mean," ruthlessly retorted the other, whose Scotch method and thrift were often being outraged by his friend's slipshod ways. "I wonder how many cigar-cases, and purses, and sticks, and umbrellas you have contrived to lose since I came to Mudport?—to say nothing of your being always ready to empty your pockets at the request of any plausible vagabond who comes to you with a whining tale. You'll get yourself into some unpleasant mess one of these days, you mark my words."

His friend, whose happy temperament was not easily ruffled, merely laughed in reply, and thought no more of the card-case, which had mysteriously disappeared from his pocket in the course of a stroll. The description given by his friend Dalrymple was so accurate, that I need offer no further delineation of Captain Godfrey Spencer, except to say that though highly popular in his regiment, his careless habits were always placing him in some dilemma or other. Perhaps unfortunately for himself, he was possessed of sufficiently ample means to enable him to bear losses with equanimity, for he was entirely his own master, having lost both parents when a child.

"There's a gentleman in your room, sir, waiting to see you," the Captain's servant informed his master, upon the latter's return to barracks an hour later.

"Mr. Algernon Lascelles Mortimer," read Godfrey from the card which was handed to him. "Don't know the name at all. Are you sure he asked for me?"

"Oh yes, sir. He came about half an hour ago, and when I told him you were out, he said he'd wait until you came back."

Easy-going Godfrey asked no further particulars, but plunging upstairs, entered the small, untidy sitting-room which was so thoroughly characteristic of its owner, and there found himself confronted by a dark, resolute-looking, and gentlemanly

young man of about his own age, who held out his hand with a smile.

"I need not ask if you are Captain Spencer, for I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to your brother George. Your name is very familiar to me, and it is possible that my friend George may have mentioned mine to you in return. Has he?"

"Well, no—I can't call to mind just now that he ever spoke of a friend named Mortimer," returned Godfrey, whose younger brother George was a lieutenant in an infantry regiment stationed at Dublin. "Do you come from Ireland?"

"Well, not just lately. It is about a month since I left Dublin," replied Mr. Mortimer. "And your brother has so many friends—you know how popular he is—that it is not surprising that my name should escape his memory, although I spent many a pleasant evening in the mess-room of the dear old Twenty-second. I always call it so, because so many of my people have been at one time or another in the regiment. But it was quite by accident that I came to call upon you to-day." He paused, and drew something from his pocket. "I believe this card-case belongs to you. I picked it up this afternoon in the High Street, and looking at the cards to find out to whom it belonged, I saw the name of Spencer, and it occurred to me that you must be the brother at Mudport of whom I have so often heard George speak."

"Thanks," said Godfrey, cordially, pleased to have his property restored. "It was awfully good of you to take the trouble to bring it back. I dropped it this afternoon. And so George has talked to you about me? I haven't seen him for more than a year, poor old boy. No, you mustn't think of going yet. Sit down and tell me how you liked Dublin."

He hospitably brought out spirits and cigars, and the two young men had a long talk. Godfrey was delighted with his companion, who seemed to have seen a good deal of the world. It appeared that he was a stranger at Mudport, where he was merely staying at a hotel for a day or two. Although not in the army, he seemed to be acquainted with the officers of most of the garrisons in England, and had an extensive knowledge of military affairs. It ended in his host giving him a cordial invitation to dine at the mess that evening, as it was guest-night. But

Mr. Mortimer declined, on the plea of a previous engagement.

"Then I'm afraid I shall hardly see you again, if you're not going to stay long," Godfrey said, in a tone of deep regret. "I have an engagement for to-morrow, and on Thursday I am going up to town to meet an old uncle of mine, Sir Horace Trevor, of whom you may have heard. He is coming from India to settle in England, after an absence of twenty years. A long time, isn't it?"

"I know Sir Horace well by reputation," said Mr. Mortimer, cordially. "Such a distinguished soldier is a relative to be proud of, Captain Spencer. He has no family of his own, I believe?"

"No, he never married. George and I are his two nearest relatives, and he looks upon us quite in the light of sons."

"He is wealthy, I presume?"

"I believe so. He was always very lucky in the way of appointments. And now that he is leaving India for good, he is bringing all his property with him—plate, and jewels, and so forth—and he wants me to meet him as soon as he lands, to see about taking care of them. It's rather nervous work, you see, to carry valuable property about nowadays. He has a presentation service of plate, and in addition some very valuable jewels, which came to him in rather an odd way. He was able to render important services to an Indian Ranee who ruled a small territory, which was in danger of being snapped up by her more powerful neighbours. She was a widow, with only one baby-son; and but for my uncle, who pleaded her cause before the Viceroy in person, she would have been robbed of her land. She was very grateful to him, but he would take nothing for his services; but when she died it was found that on her death-bed she had bequeathed to him a casket of valuable jewels, with such an urgent request that he would not refuse that testimony of her gratitude that he could not refuse to take them. There's a diamond necklace, I believe, worth several thousands; and other things to correspond. And it will be a relief to my uncle's mind when they are safely deposited in a bank."

"Quite a romance," said Mr. Mortimer, smiling as he rose to go. "But I don't think Sir Horace need feel at all apprehensive. London is, undoubtedly, the safest capital on the globe. Well, Captain Spencer, I'm very glad to have had the pleasure of meeting you, and I trust it

may not be long before I see you again. Remember me very kindly to George when you write."

"Indeed I will," said genial Godfrey, as he walked to the door with his visitor. "By-the-bye, what did you say was your address?"

"I am just giving up my chambers in the Albany, and for a few weeks my movements will be uncertain," returned his new friend. "But I'll write when I am settled again, and let you know. I am rather thinking of going to Norway for a little salmon-fishing. Good-bye, and be sure you give my message to George. I shall never forget the many pleasant hours I've spent in his company."

Godfrey returned to his room, and then for the first time noticed that he had left his writing-table unlocked, and, indeed, all his keys at the mercy of the first-comer, for they were all depending from the lock which was intended to secure the lid of his davenport. They had doubtless been there ever since he went out that afternoon. It was a piece of gross carelessness, for inside were bank-notes, a cheque-book, and various valuables, to say nothing of all his correspondence. All must have been perfectly open to Mr. Mortimer's inspection, during the half-hour he had spent in awaiting his host in solitude. But the idea that any friend of George's would be so dishonourable as to peep and pry into another man's desk was so preposterous, that it never even crossed Godfrey's easy mind. He opened his blotting-book, and took out his uncle's last letter, received that morning, in order that he might read over Sir Horace's instructions once more, so as to be quite sure that he had understood them aright.

"S.S. Bangalore, off Alexandria.

"MY DEAR NEPHEW.—When you receive this, I shall be nearing England, although by not coming overland from Brindisi, I lengthen the time which must be occupied in the journey. But I prefer to stick to the steamer, for I am getting too old now to undertake the long railway journey. I hope you will meet me at the docks, and see me safely through the Custom House to the place where I intend to put up—the Pelican Hotel in Piccadilly. I shall be glad to have a strong young fellow like you to look after me, for I am bringing no servant with me, and my sight and hearing are not quite so good as they were. I may as well tell you that I have a great deal of valuable property with

me, which I mean to deposit at my banker's; and until I have got rid of it, I shall not feel easy in my mind. You have often heard of the famous 'Ranee's necklace,' which I now have among my impediments, and it adds considerably to my anxieties.

"The steamer is due at Gravesend on Thursday next, at noon, when I shall hope to see you. Rooms are already engaged for us at the hotel, and as long as you can obtain leave of absence from your Colonel—whose acquaintance I hope to make—I shall expect you to be my guest.

"Your affectionate Uncle,

"HORACE TREVOR, K.C.B."

"Good old chap," meditated Godfrey, as he folded the letter up. "Although he's never seen me, I feel as if I knew him quite well already, and I'm sure his letters have always been most kind. A fine-looking old man, too," he added, looking at a photograph of the old General which was enclosed in the letter. "Although he's nearly seventy, I declare he hardly looks more than fifty. I only wish George were going to meet us in town too, and then I should be quite satisfied."

"Can I come in for a minute, old fellow?" asked his comrade Dalrymple, appearing at the door. "You've just had a visitor, haven't you? I saw you shaking hands with a man in the lobby."

"Yes; and do you know, I've actually got my card-case back again, Dalrymple," said Godfrey, gleefully, as he took it out of his pocket and flourished it in his friend's face. "There must be a providence which takes especial care of careless people, after all. A man picked it up in the High Street, and, seeing my name, took the trouble to bring it to me; and, oddly enough, it seems that he knows my brother George very well, and has often dined with his regiment at Dublin."

"What's his name?" asked the other, quickly.

"There's his card on the table."

"Mortimer—Mortimer," read Captain Dalrymple, thoughtfully; "and you say he is a friend of your brother's?"

"I suppose so. He knows all about his affairs and the garrison at Dublin, although I cannot call to mind at this moment that I ever heard George speak of him."

"You have never seen him before?"

"No, never."

"And have only his word for it that he is acquainted with your brother?"

"Good gracious, Dalrymple!" cried his friend, out of patience, "I declare you're

always fancying something or other. Pray, what have you got in your head now?"

"I am almost certain that Mr. Algernon Lascelles Mortimer is nothing but a common swindler. His face seemed familiar to me, and I'm sure I've seen him before. Two years ago, when I was stationed at Barminster, a plausible fellow obtained entrance to our quarters on pretence of knowing somebody or other connected with the regiment, and, after borrowing money from several of our fellows, suddenly disappeared with a number of small articles of value from our rooms. He called himself Percival then; but if he is not Algernon Mortimer he must be his brother, for I never saw two men more alike. We sent for the police, and then found that this impostor had been carrying on this game for years—going about to different garrison towns, and scraping acquaintance with the officers, in order to steal anything he could lay his hands on. In the course of his wanderings, he has acquired a knowledge of military affairs which renders it easy for him to delude the unwary."

"Mortimer's all right," doggedly repeated Godfrey. "He spoke like a gentleman; and he's a friend of George's."

"I should like to hear your brother's corroboration of that fact."

"Well, I'll write to him soon, and ask, since you won't be satisfied without. I'm sure, though, you're mistaken. This fellow never tried to get anything out of me; and, to quite settle the question," said Godfrey, triumphantly, lifting the flap of his writing-table, "he was waiting half an hour for me, with the keys in this davenport, and, though I had left twenty pounds in notes, as well as six sovereigns in this drawer, besides cheques, and other things, there's nothing missing. If he had been your man, of course he'd have walked off with the lot. Now, what do you say, Dalrymple?"

"I say what I've always said," his friend answered, quietly: "you are too hasty in bestowing your confidence. Some day you'll find yourself taken in, and then, perhaps, you will acknowledge the truth of what I say."

Godfrey only laughed in his light-hearted way; and nothing more was seen or heard of Mr. Mortimer, contrary to Captain Dalrymple's expectations. But Godfrey was surprised to receive the next evening a telegram from his uncle, dated "Paris:"

"Have changed my mind, and am coming

back overland. Will write. Do not go to London until you hear again from me, as I may stay here a few days."

Such a sudden change in his uncle's plans was unexpected, and astonishing under the circumstances. Godfrey had always believed Sir Horace to be a man of firm and inflexible will, and not likely to vacillate in such a manner. Yet there was the telegram, and to disregard it would be absurd.

He must defer going to London until he heard again from the General; and then it would doubtless be manifest that his uncle had good reasons for this alteration in his route, which he could not entrust to a telegram. Still, thinking of the valuables which the old man had in his possession, he was conscious that he would feel relieved when his uncle was safely in England. But that he feared to wound the independent spirit of the old soldier, he would have gone to meet him in Paris; but he did not like to do so unasked, knowing that Sir Horace was very impatient of anything like interference.

Careless Godfrey would not have dismissed the subject of his uncle's change of plans so lightly, had he guessed that the telegram was a forgery, and emanated from a scheme concocted in the subtle brain of Mr. Algernon Mortimer, who was just what Captain Dalrymple had designated him—a common swindler. Profiting by the accident of the keys being in the Captain's escritoire, a very brief study of Godfrey's correspondence had suggested to his mind a plan, of which the simplicity was only surpassed by the audacity. He, Algernon Mortimer, would go to meet Sir Horace at Gravesend, and lighten his responsibilities by taking upon himself the care of the Ranee's jewels.

A NEW NORTH-WEST PASSAGE.

TO CANADA VIA HUDSON'S BAY.

Two hundred and eighty years ago that adventurous mariner, Henry Hudson, left Gravesend in the little vessel Hopewell, at the charge of certain worshipful merchants of London, "to discover a passage by the North Pole to Japan and China." His craft was only what in those days was called a cock-boat, otherwise, a small yawl, and her crew consisted of ten men and a boy.

Hudson did not discover a passage to India; but he did discover that the waters

of the Spitzbergen seas were teeming with whales, and thus he laid the foundation of the whale fishery. He also discovered the east coast of Greenland and a mermaid. This, at least, is what he has recorded of the latter incident :

"One of our company, looking overboard, saw a mermaid, and calling up some of the company to see her, one more came up, and she was then close to the ship's side, looking earnestly on the men. Soon afterwards a sea came and overturned her. Her back and breasts were like a woman's; her body as big as one of us; her skin very white, and long black hair hanging down behind. In her going down they saw her tail, like the tail of a porpus, and speckled like a mackarel. Their names that saw her were Thomas Hills and Robert Rayner."

We should be disposed to say that Hudson was here unconsciously inaugurating the seal fishery also ; but the point is not material just now. What happened was that the Hopewell returned to the Thames in September, 1607, without having found a passage either to or across the North Pole.

After this, Henry Hudson made two more voyages to the North. In 1609 he discovered the Bay which still bears his name ; and in 1610 he went with the Discovery through the Straits and into the Bay. It was on this voyage that the crew mutinied, and sent him and a few faithful ones adrift in a little boat, which was never heard of more. And the ghosts of Heinrich Hudson and his men still haunt the heights of the Catskill Mountains, and play at bowls when a storm is brewing, as all who know the story of Rip Van Winkle are aware.

Hudson's purpose on the third voyage was to make his way through an opening which had been previously observed, and through which it was hoped to find an alternative to the phantom polar route to the North-west. That opening is now known as Hudson's Strait, and, in pushing through it to the west, the audacious Discovery, only fifty-five tons, and manned by twenty-one men, was laying the foundation of the fortune of the great Hudson's Bay Company, which exists to this day, and which has done so much to open up the northern and western half of the North Continent of America. For, although Hudson himself did not return, the news brought by the survivors of his party led to the despatch of other expeditions. It is of inter-

est to follow briefly the records of these expeditions in so far as they tend to demonstrate the navigability of what promises to be soon a new commercial and strategic route to our Western Empire.

The Discovery entered Hudson's Strait in June, 1610, and had much difficulty with the ice. She was—as has been said—but a pygmy of a vessel, and ill fitted to cope with the giant grip of the Frost King. But she did get through, and on the return voyage in the August of the following year, found an open channel to the sea.

In 1612 the Resolution was sent, under the command of Sir Thomas Butler, to test the same route. She was able to get through with comparative ease in the month of June, and, after wintering on the west coast of Hudson's Bay, the party returned in the summer of 1613, without meeting with any obstacles in the Straits.

Once more the little Discovery made the attempt, under the command of Robert Bylet, with the famous William Baffin as pilot. This was in 1615, and Hudson's Strait was entered in the month of May. This was too early, and it was the end of June before she got through ; but on the return in August the channel was again clear.

Then there was a pause in the quest, and not until 1619 did another English, and also a Danish, expedition penetrate into the mysterious inland sea. These were followed twelve years later by two other expeditions from England. One of these last was under the command of Captain Luke Fox, who thus quaintly describes the ice he encountered :

"The ice in the Strait consists of two kinds, one of which is mountainous—a huge piece, compact, of great quantity, some more, some less—but in this freet" (strait) "you seldom have any bigger than a great church, and most thereof lesse. The other kind is smaller, and is what we call mesht, or fleacht ice. Of this you shall there have numbers infinite, some of the quantity of a roode, some a perch, some an acre or two acres. But the most is small, and about a foot or two above water, and eight or ten under water ; and these are they what do enclose you, so as in much wind from the topmast head you shall hardly see any water for them. But while you lie amongst them it is so smooth as you shall not feel the ship stirre."

Commodore Markham, who visited this

region in the Alert in 1866, says that this description quite coincides with his own experience of the ice two hundred and fifty years after Captain Fox. It exactly describes, he says, the peculiar nature of the ice that is usually met with to the present day, during the navigable season, in this channel. And here we must acknowledge our indebtedness to Commodore Markham's recent communication to the Royal Geographical Society, in the preparation of this article.

Captain Fox found little difficulty in the Strait, and got into the Bay by the middle of July. On returning he encountered no difficulty whatever, although it was the thirty-first of October before he reached the Atlantic end of the Strait.

There was another pause in exploration until 1669, when the Hudson's Bay Company was incorporated by Royal Charter, and Gillam was sent out in the Nonsuch to establish a settlement. This he did at Fort Charles, at the south end of the Bay, going and returning through the Strait without difficulty. Thereafter, for fifty years, the ships of the Company went back and forward at frequent intervals. The Company also fitted out two or three special expeditions for purposes of discovery around their territory, but these resulted in disaster.

Captain Middleton's exploring expedition in 1741, and Captain Moor's in 1746, however, resulted in considerable additions to the knowledge of the geography and navigation of these waters; and Captain Wales, sent out by the Royal Society in 1768, made the passage of the Strait in nine days, his only difficulty being with contrary winds and calms. The year 1791, however, was an exceptional one, for the ice was so long in breaking up, that a Company's ship, under Captain Duncan, could not get into the Bay until the month of September. This is the only case of the kind on record.

Parry, in 1821, encountered a good deal of ice in the Strait in the month of July, but was less bothered by it than by contrary winds. In returning, in September, 1823, he was only five days in running through the Strait, and saw no ice at all. Parry wrote that as the result of his experience, and that of his predecessors, it should be accepted as a general rule that in most seasons, nothing was to be gained by attempting to pass Hudson's Strait earlier than the first week of July.

Commodore Markham says that he

wholly agrees with Parry as regards sailing-ships, to which the remark was meant to apply. But he points out that steam has made a great revolution in ice navigation, and that a well-found steamer is now able to make her way with ease through Hudson's Strait in June, when a sailing-ship would be hopelessly lost.

The last Government expedition to Hudson's Bay was that of Sir George Back, in the Terror, in 1836. This was a bad ice year, and it took the ship a fortnight to get through in the month of August. The whole voyage of the Terror, however, was a succession of troubles and disasters, and it was only by a miracle that she was, by clever seamanship, enabled to bring her gallant crew home again.

But, meanwhile, the trading ships of the Hudson's Bay Company were making annual voyages between England and the Factories at York and Moose, and other established stations. Even in the last century they rarely failed to make the voyage, and very few of their ships were lost. As the business grew, sometimes two, and even three, ships were despatched in a year.

Commodore Markham has had access to the records of the Company's voyages for a period of eleven years from 1835 to 1846. He finds that during these years the average time of getting through the Strait on the outward voyages was sixteen days; the longest time was thirty-one days, and the shortest time was eight days. The delays were invariably caused by calms and adverse winds, and not by the ice. No difficulties at all from ice were met with in the homeward voyage, the earliest date of leaving upon which was the sixth of September, and the latest the third of October. That is to say, these were the dates when the vessels left the Factories in Hudson's Bay for London.

This, then, is a summary of the evidence of two centuries and a half regarding the navigability of Hudson's Strait. That passage is five hundred miles long, with an average breadth of one hundred miles, and a minimum breadth, at the narrowest parts, of forty-five miles. It is a deep channel, remarkably free from rocks and shoals, and while separating Labrador from Arctic America, is the only known inlet to the great area of waters known as Hudson's Bay.

This Mediterranean of North America is nine hundred miles from north to south, and about six hundred miles wide, and it covers

an area of about five hundred thousand square miles. Its southern limit is just above the fiftieth parallel of North latitude, and its northern limit touches the sixty-fourth parallel. It has a pretty uniform depth of about seventy fathoms; is free from rocks and shoals; is seldom troubled by storms and fogs; and does not know icebergs. Lieutenant Gordon, sent lately by the Canadian Government to make observations, reports that the temperature of the water of the Bay is fourteen degrees higher than that of Lake Superior, and that therefore, "Hudson's Bay may be regarded as a vast basin of comparatively warm water, the effect of which must be to ameliorate the winter climate to the south and east of it."

Nevertheless, the winters are very severe, and although it has been said that the summer is genial enough to allow of the growth of European vegetables in the open air, the testimony upon that head is a little conflicting. At any rate, there is no difficulty known, or suggested, as to the navigation of the Bay, and the point of interest with regard to the proposed scheme to which we shall presently refer, is to determine for how great a portion of the year the passage of the Strait may be made with reasonable safety, and without undue delay.

The argument is that "a channel which has been navigated for two hundred and twenty years—first by the frail fly-boats of the seventeenth century, then by the bluff-bowed, slow-sailing, exploring vessels of Parry's days, and for a long period by the Hudson's Bay Company's ships—cannot be very formidable, and if sailing-ships can annually pass through it, 'a fortiori,' steamers will find less difficulty in doing so. But it would be necessary that such steamers should be specially built and equipped for the service, and it is desirable that despatch should be used in making the voyage." This is the argument of Commodore Markham, who further says, "The steamers for this navigation should be specially constructed to resist ordinary ice-pressure, and should be provided with power to steam at least ten or twelve knots."

It is by this route that the Canadians propose to form a new link with the Mother Country. The idea is to construct a railway from Winnipeg to Churchill, or Nelson, on the west shores of Hudson's Bay; to form a good harbour at the terminus; and to have a special line of

steamers to run thence during the season to Liverpool or Glasgow. It was with this scheme in view that the Canadian Government instituted a series of observations to which brief reference may now be made.

In the year 1884, a sailing steamer called the *Neptune* was purchased by the Canadian Government and despatched to Hudson's Strait for the purpose of establishing stations on both sides of the Strait, at which continuous daily observations could be taken and recorded on the weather, tide, temperature, condition and movements of the ice, etc., for a period of at least twelve months. The *Neptune* made a successful voyage, and the stations were located as follows: one near Ungava Bay, close to the entrance on the south side; one near the Upper Savage Islands at Ashe Inlet; one immediately opposite on the south side of the Strait; one at Nottingham Island; and one at Digges Island, just where the Strait opens into the Bay.

At each of these five stations there was an observer with a couple of attendants provisioned for fully twelve months.

The *Neptune* then returned to Halifax, and the Captain reported that had he been going right through the Strait to Churchill, he would not have been delayed by the ice for twenty-four hours. On the homeward voyage there was no encounter whatever with ice; and it is noteworthy that the *Neptune* was the first steam-vessel that ever entered Hudson's Bay.

In the spring of 1885, the English Government placed Her Majesty's ship *Alert* (well known in connection with Sir George Nares' expedition) at the disposal of the Canadian Government, in order to pursue the enquiry into the navigability of the Strait. Officered and manned by the Canadian Government, the *Alert* left Halifax on the sixteenth of June; but she does not seem to have been very well managed, for she did not reach Churchill until the end of August, after spending a few days at each station in the Strait. She met with no ice on the return journey early in October. The stations were re-provisioned for another year, and the reports brought back were regarded as favourable "in so far as they bore on the question of the safe navigation of Hudson's Strait during a certain period of the year."

In 1886, the *Alert* was again despatched, and this time Commodore Markham went

with her, in an unofficial capacity, and to see for himself whether a commercial highway is practicable by this route. Sailing from Halifax on the twenty-third of June, 1886, Hudson's Strait was reached on the fifth of July, where thick weather and loose streams of ice were met with. The ice, however, was never packed sufficiently close to prevent the Alert from making fairly good progress—and the Alert is a slow steamer. Between the ninth and eleventh of July, and for two hundred miles, no ice was seen at all, and on the eleventh of July the first station on the north side of the Strait was reached. The observers there had had a pleasant winter, and reported "that the ice did not form in the Strait before December, and that the channel was perfectly free for navigation during the entire month of November." Game was also reported to be plentiful in the neighbourhood.

The Alert continued her passage through the Strait, but was a good deal delayed by the ice—the slow progress being attributed by Commodore Markham to her deficient steam-power, and to the inexperience of ice-navigation of those in charge. "Practical experience, unceasing vigilance, and a happy knack of doing the right thing at the right moment, are essential qualifications for those seamen who desire to become successful ice-navigators."

On the twentieth of July the Alert reached the observatory on Digges Island, which was the scene of the crisis in Henry Hudson's voyage. It is described as consisting of bare hills of gneiss, rising to a height of about five hundred feet, intersected by broad valleys, carpeted with moss and coarse grass. From Digges Island the Alert passed into Hudson's Bay, and with the exception of a few streams of broken-up stuff, saw no more ice until she dropped anchor in Churchill Harbour on the twenty-ninth of July. Commodore Markham left the vessel there and made his way by canoe to Winnipeg, but the Alert, returning through the Strait, picked up the observers and took them back to Halifax without any more difficulties with the ice.

It has been stated that the reports of the observers have not been regarded as conclusive enough by the Government, and that divided counsels still prevail. But Commodore Markham asserts from his own observations, and from a careful study of the reports of others, that Hudson's Strait is certainly quite navigable,

and free from ice in August and later in the season. Only once since 1735 have the ships of the Hudson's Bay Company failed to make the voyage; and it is said that since old Hudson took the Discovery through the Strait, the passage has been made five hundred times, while the losses due to the ice could be counted upon the fingers of one hand.

If a review be made of all the voyages of which we have given particulars above, it will be seen that the Strait has been entered in May and passed in June outwards, while the testimony is unanimous in favour of a homeward passage up till the end of October at any rate. We thus have a possible period of five months, and a tolerably certain period of three months during which the Strait is navigable for suitably-constructed vessels. Competent Canadian authorities estimate the average period of safe navigation at three months.

Would that serve to make the proposed route remunerative? It all depends on the traffic. Sir Charles Tupper says that last season sixteen million bushels of grain were produced in Manitoba and the North-West Territory, the chief outlet for which was by means of the Canadian Pacific Railway down to Montreal and Quebec, whence it was taken by steamer to England. But a large portion of it could not make use of the route, and had to be sent by way of Lake Superior to New York for shipment.

This is what the Canadians do not want. They wish to be independent of the United States in sending their products to market; and, indeed, if President Cleveland carries out his Retaliation Policy, they will be compelled to find routes of their own. It is estimated that by the Hudson's Bay route the distance to be traversed by the produce of the Far West coming to England would be shortened by one-half, which, at the existing rates of carriage, would be equal to a saving to the farmers of about three pounds sterling per head of cattle, and five shillings per quarter of grain, exported.

This is a very important consideration, and it all seems to depend on the construction of a railway from Winnipeg to a point on the shore of Hudson's Bay—that is to say, a distance of about seven hundred miles. That would bring the capital of Manitoba some eleven hundred miles nearer to us than it is by way of New York. At present, however, the scheme is confined to a railway of only

some three hundred miles in length, from the head of Lake Winnipeg to Churchill, and the capital required for this is so small that it is estimated that if the navigation be open for only two-and-a-half months, the earnings, it is said, would be sufficient to pay interest on the investment. It is not our purpose, however, to discuss the financial aspect of the question. That chiefly concerns the Canadians, who are by no means backward in enterprise, as the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway has proved. The Hudson's Bay scheme is a small affair compared with that huge line; and, as the Canadian Government are willing to grant seven millions of acres of land to subsidise a line from Winnipeg to Churchill, we may reasonably infer that, as Sir Charles Tupper predicts, the day is not far distant when it will be a reality. The subject is full of interest, both in its geographical, its economic, and its commercial aspects.

A NEGLECTED ART.

To all who have had any experience in drawing-rooms, parlours, or wherever human creatures meet for purposes of social enjoyment, it must have appeared that, however good the other concomitants of the hour may have been, the conversation was, as a rule, eminently that part of the entertainment which had been left entirely unrehearsed, and which charged their memories with the most dismal recollections of vapid weariness. There are, no doubt, many explanations which may sufficiently account for the fact, but none are of a nature so peremptory as to forbid the hope of improvement. And though we may not feel any latent qualifications, being plain people, for the rôle of a Sheridan or a Conversation Sharp, nor have any frivolous taste for prattle and "persiflage," we can easily see that conversation ought to be enjoyable, and that there is a distinct call upon us to do our best to make it so. We may safely say that in our social converse there is something worthy of more consideration than is usually bestowed upon it; that the mechanical facility of the tongue may be the means of betraying us into the shallowness and heaviness which mark the chatteringer and the bore; that we do not, in truth, appreciate the gift of speech, nor are we sensible of its social obligations; and that there is much to spur, and much to encourage us to

cultivate this talent which usually runs so profusely to waste in our possession.

Sydney Smith professed an opinion that any man can become a wit just as he can become a mathematician, and that by giving to the subject only six hours a day "he should improve prodigiously before mid-summer."

But it is always possible for a man to be a very charming talker without meriting the appellation of a wit, and whatever truth there may be in Sydney Smith's dictum as it stands, to amend it by substituting for the word wit the word conversationalist, would be to render it incontrovertible. The faculty of talking is, indeed, too seldom regarded in the light of a talent to be polished and variously improved. It is so freely employed in all sorts of necessary trivialities that, like the dyer's hand, it becomes subdued to that it works in, and appears itself trivial. Its exercise is so common that it escapes our consciousness, and the motions of the tongue being as habitual as those of the legs, we become as "flat-footed" in our conversation, as we are, too many of us, in our carriage. Furthermore, the general disgust at those very proper objects of aversion, priggishness and pedantry, has far too much power over us. Under the influence of this feeling we confound things which are different, and think that we incur the dreaded odium by leaving the beaten track of commonplace, and trying to entertain people with some special subject about which we fancy we can talk well. The pedant and the prig do not try to entertain and interest their hearers, but to gratify themselves; the distinction is a marked one; and the intention of the talker soon becomes apparent.

In comparison with many delightful social arts, such as music, dancing, and private theatricals, conversation is not regarded as having any distinct function of entertainment. Certainly, we often find it entertaining, sometimes illegitimately so with the zest of scandal, sometimes legitimately with the brightness of good-humoured wit, and the charm of eloquent information; but we are not accustomed to expect that the men and women who talk to us should make any preparations to this end equivalent to those which we suppose them to have made when they sing to us, or dance with us. Yet there is unquestionably a felicity of conversation, which can only be conferred by study and

practice, but which, by these means, can be almost universally gained. And we can more easily excuse a man for paining us by his bad singing, or awkward waltzing, than for wearying us either by talking nonsense, or saying nothing at all.

It is of course quite conventional to be sarcastic upon prepared conversation, and many a sly platitude is "popped" at studied impromptus and premeditated puns. "Why should I disparage my parts by thinking what to say?" says Mr. Brisk in the "Double Dealer." "None but dull rogues think; witty men, like rich fellows, are always ready for all expenses, while your blockheads, like needy scoundrels, are forced to examine their stock, and forecast the charges of the day." But Mr. Brisk appears among the dramatis personæ as a "pert coxcomb," and a pert coxcomb is always ready for all expenses, simply because he has the faculty of being able to enjoy his own witticisms, without any reference to the sentiments of his listeners. He is opulent because he acts as his own banker, and never fails to honour the bills he draws upon himself. Indeed, the style of Mr. Brisk's sneer gives the lie direct to its sense, for it is polished and balanced with the loving pains which the old dramatist never spared upon his work. There is something very unreasonable in these sneers, which are not commonly uttered by wits but by those shallow pretenders who have little to recommend them but their impudence and vivacity. If a man has selected his subjects, carefully considered and arranged his ideas, aptly chosen his quotations, and assured himself of every point in his stories, it must surely betray a completely inverted process of reasoning to find in these things matter of complaint against him. There is too prevalent a disposition to put the man who tries to please us by his talk on trial, and hold him bound to prove to our satisfaction that he is original, whereas the true point is, whether, or not, he is interesting or amusing. If we are moved to laughter let us laugh and be thankful, and not weary ourselves with minute enquiries into the antecedent processes, the result of which, at any rate, is our entertainment. There is a remuneration of praise due to him who has pleased us, and to withhold it is an act of meanness on our part. We know it, however, to be a well-ascertained fact of human nature that men feel the sorest against those who have obliged them, and it is in perfect consistency with this

principle that they should be in an ill humour with those who have put them in a good one.

The "diners out," who made talking the business of their lives, who "got up" their conversation as a barrister his brief, and studied their stories as an actor his part, were certainly very delightful company, and more than earned the good things they swallowed by the good things they said. With the nicest appreciation of the conditions under which they exercised their art, they gently engaged the attention of their fellow-guests during the change of courses, and never made the mistake of saying their best things when the cook was on trial. They managed to give the note of conversation, and, without appearing to do so, to keep it in the channel they affected. Recognising that their business was conversation — not speech-making—they observed Lord Chesterfield's rule :

"Pay your own reckoning, but do not treat the whole company; this being one of the very few cases in which people do not care to be treated, every one being fully convinced that he has wherewithal to pay."

Their continual practice gave the easy air of spontaneity to their most elaborate preparations, and their most carefully-studied impromptus sprang to light with the careless grace of a sylph of the ballet, who has spent many an hour of toil in becoming capable of her ethereal motions and "poses plastiques."

It was not because they possessed extraordinary mental gifts that the company of these men was sought, but because they had made themselves unusually proficient in the art of agreeable converse: which is an art conferring pleasures not inferior to those yielded by any other social accomplishment whatever, from singing to whistling, from playing fantasias on the piano to strumming breakdowns on the banjo, and which ought, in an appreciable degree, to form part of the equipment of every man and woman of average education and intelligence.

Those highly respectable people, the bores, who may well be considered a "great race," in virtue of their imperial exactions upon the time and patience of their protesting fellows, are certainly abused almost to the limits of their deserts. They are constantly exalted on the pillory of the satirist, and made amusing in public in return for being so tiresome in private.

They are, indeed, much worthier of a Dunciad than the men enshrined in Pope's satiric verse. The offence of Budgell, Broome, Blackmore, and the rest of the elect was that they wrote dull books; but they were guiltless of forcibly imposing their dulness on people who wanted to be let alone. A book can be tossed aside, and this is what happened to their books; but a bore, being a person with civil rights, which, in the present state of the law, are not invalidated by his tediousness, and sometimes having a social weight almost equal to his conversational ponderosity, cannot be so promptly dismissed. An afflicting circumstance in the case is that he is usually quite unconscious of the suffering he continues to inflict. The hint courteous, albeit of the finest temper and sharpest point, fails to pierce his quilted doublet. Even Hotspur's rude indifference to Glendower, who "held him, but last night at least nine hours, In reckoning up the several devils' names, That were his lackeys," availed not to silence his prolix tormentor, whose muddy stream flowed equably on, gathering force from every interruption.

The late Mr. Hayward, in one of his interesting essays, says: "A French nobleman, the Duc de Laraguais, armed with legal and medical authorities to the effect that death might be produced by ennui, and that the means by which it was illegally inflicted were immaterial, formally prosecuted a famous Parisian bore for an attempt upon his life." It would appear from the circumstance that this prosecution is recorded as a singular fact, that it did not succeed, for if it had succeeded there can be no doubt that similar causes would have followed, to the extent of becoming as commonplace as actions for breach of promise or defamation of character.

"Time is the stuff that life is made of," and though we might as a jury feel some difficulty in hanging a man for his depredations, even upon that precious part of the commodity which we reserve for our ease and pleasure, we surely have a right to some remedy when our leisure is flooded by the expansive impertinences of the fluent proser, or desolated by the Arctic influences which accompany "the solemn fop, significant and budge."

Yet, even as dirt is said to be but matter in the wrong place, so in many instances is it true that a bore is a philosopher in the wrong company. His conversation, while very delightful to the circle which

shares his peculiar tastes, is unutterable weariness to the man who understands none of those things, and is not willing to be instructed upon them. The phrase, "caviare to the general," properly describes the relation of very many topics to our minds. Without demurring to anything that may be said in their praise, we are not sufficiently attracted by them to make us dissatisfied with our ignorance, and we resent all attempts to force their acquaintance upon us.

The apocryphal Cantab, who complained that he was unable to see what "Paradise Lost" proved, and the compleat Oxonian, who could find neither plot nor poetry in "Euclid's Elements," were presumably clever enough in their respective spheres, but in the absence of other grounds of agreement, they would have been poor company for one another in a railway-carriage. If a man is engrossed with any one subject to such a degree that he feels an extraordinary pleasure in talking upon it, he ought, equally in mercy to his friends and in justice to himself, to seriously face the question whether he is not in all probability an intolerable nuisance. The singularity of his taste, either in the measure of its intensity, or the nature of its object, renders it almost impossible for him to excite or sustain that sympathy among his listeners which is the vital air of agreeable conversation. Yet admitting that it is a grievous fault to overlook the yawning gulf which lies between him and the minds of his hearers; to be blind to all those polite symptoms of weariness which appear in the stolid look and the cold reply, the fault is venial compared with that vice in the listener which consists in a disposition to flit from flower to flower of frivolous gossip, and to find no pleasure in hearing anything that demands and presupposes some exertion of thought. It is always a point worthy of reflection when we condemn a man for being heavy, whether the fact be not the reverse, and ourselves too inert to follow him to wider fields and loftier heights. If there is a distinct duty imposed upon us as talkers, we have an equally distinct duty to discharge as listeners. And it is by the exercise of the latter function that we in a large degree contribute to our success in the former. We widen our capacity of interest, and in this way enable ourselves to enjoy new topics not only as receivers, but as distributers. We are enabled the more

easily to sympathise with our hearers, and thus to divine when they cease to sympathise with us. In matters of dispute our intellectual powers are largely called upon, for we must remember what has been said by others and what we want to say ourselves; observe wherein terms are substantially identical or substantially distinct, weigh arguments, note inconsistencies. Both our memory and our logic thus receive a training in listening, of which we cannot but find the good effects in talking. Our words of persuasion are the more likely to be listened to when we have ourselves shown a desire to hear and weigh all that others may have to offer; our stories will have a better chance of being properly appreciated; and our humorous extravagances will be received with a temper the mirthful inclination of which is not modified by the various degrees of resentful feeling which are the product of neglect on our part.

Above all things, those sweetening elements of social life, good humour and good manners, must be in continual operation. That unpleasant peculiarity of Dr. Johnson which appeared in a habit, when his pistol missed fire, of knocking down his opponent with the butt-end, and the ill tempered sarcasms of Rogers, are always unpardonable, even when accompanied by the finest wit and the highest attainments. It must surely be very painful to all good-natured people to see any man's well-meant efforts to "pay his own reckoning" peevishly contested, and his coins flung back contemptuously in his face. The super-sensitive being who chafes under the slightest raillery is equally objectionable with the petulant wit, and the pleasure of the company is only to be saved by the presence of the one to act as a foil to the other. We may thus see that a finished conversationalist must combine those excellent virtues of good temper and good feeling, which we are supposed to cultivate every day of our lives, and which are the special characteristics of the gentleman and the gentlewoman.

There are few more delightful pictures than that of a company of pleasant talkers met together under agreeable post-prandial conditions, who, in the words of a French writer, "handle the treasures of the human intellect, not in large sacks and heavy ingots, but in pretty, portable gold coins," and whom a general good temper and fine taste harmonise in a most charming concert of varied talents and conflicting

opinions. At present, the picture seems somewhat ideal, but it would speedily become illustrative of one of the happiest and most usual of social realities if a proper view were generally taken of polite conversation, both with regard to the efforts it demands and the pleasures it bestows.

THE TROTH OF ODIN.

BY C. GRANT FURLEY.

A STORY IN THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

ON the following Sunday Mr. Traill, the minister of Stromness, spent the whole of the interval between the morning and afternoon services in repeatedly telling his ward that he thought very highly of a certain young man who had introduced himself to him after what the minister called "the diet of public worship."

"I noticed him when I was preaching, Thora, and perhaps you saw him, too, though he was sitting at the back of the church. He is dark, and his hair is cut wonderfully short — you would hardly think that ordinary scissors could clip so close; and his eyes wandered more than I liked. But there's some excuse for him. He is a Frenchman, it seems, and has come to see to the repair of the schooner which was stranded on the Holms a week or two ago; so it's likely enough that he didn't understand the whole of my discourse. He seems to have not much English yet, and what he has is learned mostly from books; but it's something to see a Frenchman in a church at all, and I think well of him for it. I know the French nation"—long ago in his youth, when Louis Philippe was on the throne, the minister had spent a week in Paris, which, of course, gave him a right to speak with authority concerning the intellect, morals, and religion of the French people—"I know them, and they are a godless race; so I am inclined to think very favourably of this young man, who is evidently superior to most of his fellow countrymen. He is a bit of an archaeologist, too; at least, it was on the score of my knowledge of our antiquities and his interest in them, that he sought my acquaintance. I promised to show him my own collection, and to take him to the Dwarfie Stone, and the Maeshowe, and the other spots of interest in the neighbourhood. He is to

take his tea at the Manse to-morrow, so you had better tell Osla to make some scones, and you can get out the best china. I want to read him my paper on the astero-lepis, that very remarkable fossil which Hugh Miller found in the neighbourhood of Stromness, and to show how it proves that the man Darwin is entirely wrong, and justifies the Bible theory of Creation."

"Do you think M. Harache will care for that?" asked Thora, who had been listening to her guardian's words with more interest than he knew.

"I am sure he will—at least he ought to. But how do you come to know his name?" asked Mr. Traill, in some surprise.

Thora looked a little startled when she perceived that she had betrayed her acquaintance with the stranger; but she had an answer ready.

"I saw him going about, and thought him outlandish—strangers aren't so common in Stromness that one wouldn't take note of one—so I pointed him out to Osla. She wanted to know who he was, so she asked at the inn, and told me."

"I see, I see. Well, we must make him welcome and do what we can for him. It may be that he will carry a light from here to his own darkened land."

For the minister also had a missionary spirit, and would fain have led this young man, whom Providence had cast in his way, from out of the night of Roman bondage into the sweetness and light of the gospel according to Calvin.

"How can I speak to him when I do not know his tongue?" said Thora, with a touch of sullenness, and more than a touch of deceit. But that silent compact made between the two when first they had met, three days before, had implied a determination to increase their acquaintance by any means possible; and since Gaspard had chosen to seek the minister's favour by means of his pet hobbies, it was wise not to spoil the apparent sincerity of his actions by betraying the possible existence of any other motive.

"I wish I knew French," the girl went on. "I shall feel very stupid, listening to you two, and not knowing what you say."

"Oh, he'll speak English," answered the minister, not caring to confess that he himself would be unable to carry on conversation in French; "still, it might be well if you knew a little of some other tongue than your own. I'll look out a grammar tomorrow, and give you one or two lessons."

What the value of the minister's lessons | would have been it is useless to enquire, for they were never given.

Gaspard appeared the following evening after his work on the *Belle Armande* was finished, and proved himself to be an ideal guest. He admired the fossil which, in the minister's opinion, destroyed the evolution theory, and listened with reverence and apparent conviction to the arguments whereby Mr. Traill proved to his own satisfaction that Darwin was a liar, an impostor, and an atheist. He ventured some enquiries on things archaeological, and his ignorance of English fortunately covered his ignorance of the subject of his questions. When the minister deftly introduced a theological flavour into the conversation, he took it so well that Mr. Traill subsequently declared that he had a mind singularly open to conviction. This might be so, for really there were no very strong convictions there for this missionary of Protestantism to displace. A healthy-minded man of three-and-twenty does not often give a very large amount of thought to questions affecting his future destiny; his present life offers him too many interests and problems to leave him time to trouble about the next.

Finally, when Mr. Traill mentioned, by way of a jest, the anxiety Thora had felt lest she should not understand the stranger, Gaspard offered eagerly to give her lessons in his tongue, as a recompense—no, "pas ça," but as an expression of gratitude for the kindness he had received.

"There's a chance for you, Thora," said the minister, smiling. "Would you like to learn from M. Harache?"

And Thora answered, "Yes."

The two excuses, what he could learn and what he could teach, soon made Gaspard an intimate at the Manse. Perhaps Thora did not profit much by his teaching, for his method was by no means strictly academic; but neither cared much for verbs and nouns. She wanted only to hear more of France, that strange, far-off country which her dreams now made a fairy-land. He desired only some excuse "to look upon her beauty, nothing further." Her beauty, in which he read all that a lover's soul could desire—gentleness, truth, faith, patience, courage, fidelity, love! It takes a life-time's joys and sorrows, a life-time's aspirations and failures, to paint the soul upon the countenance; but to Gaspard's love-blinded brain, the bright eyes and wild-rose cheeks of untroubled youth gave promise of all nobility of soul. Then her

voice! It thrilled his very soul by its sad, languid, musical tones. He forgot that he heard the same accent from the landlady of his inn, and from the workmen who were labouring at the Belle Armande, and was not moved thereby. He noticed it in Thora only, and it spoke to him of life and youth repressed to a round of monotonous duty which wore out both before their time. And when he could persuade her unfamiliar lips to falter out one or two French words, they seemed to him like a caress. He could see no fault or flaw in her. Even the discontent she showed with her present course of life seemed to him but the expression of divine despair.

There is indeed a noble discontent, a Heaven-sent hunger of heart and brain for their rightful food of love and knowledge, to gratify which the soul will overleap all bounds of habit and training, and even seeming duty; but the name and lineaments of that divine longing are often borrowed by a petty restlessness that has its birth only in selfishness and the desire of change. But how shall a man distinguish between the two? Above all, a young man to whom a beautiful woman says, day after day: "Tell me about your country and your home. Your words make me long to go to the places you speak of."

Every evening saw him at the Manse, basking in the light of Thora's eyes. Sometimes, indeed, he had to pay for the privilege, by being forced to listen to the minister's disquisitions on things ancient and modern. Yet these, even to his preoccupied mind, were not always uninteresting. Gaspard's interest in archaeology was not wholly a pretence. He had wandered through Brittany, and could talk of dolmens and menhirs; and Mr. Traill, when one made allowance for his whims and prejudices, had a fund of knowledge about the remains that abounded in his native islands, the relics of the old heroic Viking days, and yet older Druidic times. Sometimes the young Frenchman could spare an afternoon from his duties on the Belle Armande, and then he and the minister, sometimes accompanied by Thora, sometimes alone, visited those spots in the neighbourhood of Stromness which are dear to the antiquary's soul. Gaspard proved to be a good listener, especially when Thora was absent. If she were with them, his attention would wander, for she was too restless to remain by the old man's side and listen to his words—

she must always wander off to pluck flowers, or seek some new point of view from which to gaze at the familiar scenery, and Gaspard's eyes and thoughts were apt to follow her. Yet it was from the excursions she shared, that he professed most to have profited.

The three of them crossed the restless strait that separates Mainland from Hoy, to see the haunted Dwarfie Stone. Mr. Traill was conveyed from the beach to the great boulder in the mail-cart, a rough farm-waggon, drawn by a stolid bullock; but Gaspard and Thora preferred to exercise their young limbs by a cross-country tramp, leaping from one rough clump of heather to another, and stopping occasionally to pluck a plant of silky cotton-grass, or sweet bog-myrtle, or unfamiliar, delicate, quaint moss. Then the minister told them the legend of the dwarf who had hewn out the two cramped chambers in the great stone, and of the trolls and pixies who had visited him there, narrating the tale with an affected incredulity which barely veiled his hereditary belief in it. There came a sudden storm of rain while he was telling his story, and the trio hurried home; but though they were soaked with both rain and spray before they regained the Manse of Stromness, Gaspard declared fervently that it had been an exquisite day, one he should never forget.

He was less contented on the day when he and Mr. Traill went to the Maeshows and the Stones of Stennis, Thora being kept at home by old Osla, the housekeeper, to help in some domestic task.

The girl had been inclined to sulk at this claim upon her; but Osla was a tyrant in her way, and ruled both the minister and his adopted child.

"Da lassie's seen a da stanes in da kintra," she said with her Shetland drawl, and her hereditary Norse inability to pronounce the diphthong. "If you will gang a'round de place wi' dis lad you can dae'; but dere's nae good in de lassie trailing after you like a doggie."

This was to Mr. Traill. To Thora she spoke more gently:

"Dinna you greet, lamb, at biding wi' me. It's no da stanes you wants to see; and if this Yaspard"—the Shetland form of Gaspard or Jasper—"likes you in da right way, he has seen enough o' you to speak his mind; and if he doesna, da less you sees o' him da better."

There was no use in fretting; Osla must

have her way ; and having got it she tried to console the girl by telling her all manner of weird and wonderful stories of Northern witches who rode on the Aurora Borealis, and by repeating old ballads that might have been versions of some of the sagas in Snorro Sturleson's great romance, the "Heimskringla," with its fierce stories of Vikings and sea-rovers, who thought it shame to die in their beds, or to accept life from a victorious foe.

"And I'll tell you how I first came to Orkney," said the old woman, when other tales were done. Thora had heard the story a hundred times already ; but she was always ready to hear it again, though her imagination never could connect its long-ago romance with Osla's wrinkled, weather-beaten face and shrunken figure. It was no very wonderful story either ; but a woman's own love-tale is always for her the one romance the world has ever known. Osla and a certain Lowrie had been lovers against their parents' will, and since their own minister would not marry them in face of the disapproval of their kindred, they had fled from far north-west in a fishing-boat, and come to the mainland of Orkney, and there, in the most sacred spot in the whole archipelago, within the circle of the Stones of Stennis, they had taken each other for husband and wife.

"Da minister here he said it wasna a right marriage ; but Lowrie askit a lawyer in Kirkwall, and he said that if we chose to call it a marriage it was one. But we had both kenned that afore ; it would be a queer Hialtlander that would not think the Troth of Odin a true bond, wherever it was sworn, though we came to the big stone wi' the hole in't in the midst o' the Stones of Stennis, to make it as sure as sure could be."

Thora tried to picture to herself that long-past wedding ; but instead, her mind could only see the group which most probably was standing within the sacred circle at that moment—a group of two men, the elder explaining, and the younger listening.

Mr. Traill and Gaspard had gone first to the Maeshowe, that strangest of mementoes of old times. A simple mound of earth, it seems, but covered with grass a little softer and smoother than that of the field from which it rises. Within is a small square chamber built of heavy stone. It may have been meant for a robbers' den, a wizard's cave, a hermit's cell, or a chieftain's tomb ; no man now can tell.

All that is clear about the Maeshowe is that countless centuries ago some man built up this cavern of great blocks of stone, and made cunning recesses in it wherein a human body might lie, and engraved on the walls inscriptions which seem to the uninitiated only haphazard wavy lines, while of their meaning no antiquary can assuredly say more than this : that the interpretation given by all the other antiquaries is hopelessly and entirely wrong. Then the unknown builder hid treasure in his cavern, and covered it over with earth, and afterwards went elsewhere and died. After that the spirit of Nature took possession of it, and dealt tenderly with the great ugly heap of earth, dressing it with soft grass and dainty flowers ; and so robed, it remained peacefully till that modern creature, the child of curiosity and irreverence, known as the science of archaeology, came along and broke into the mound, took away the golden trinkets it found there to put them into a glass case in a museum, and made the Maeshowe a spot for every idle visitor to peer and pry into.

Then they went to the Stones of Stennis. A solemn awe came over Gaspard as he stood within the sacred circle. With the sea on one side, and the wide lagoon on the other, it seemed as though the flat peninsula, which the circle of great grey monoliths bounded, was an island which lay lower than the surrounding ocean, and was kept from submersion by some miraculous power. The crimson of the sunset flooded the sky and touched to a brighter purple the opening bells of the heather, but seemed to fall powerless on the surface of the solemn lichen-covered stones. Grey, cold, immoveable as justice, impenetrable as night, obdurate as time, they stood as if deriding the power of any evanescent glory of colour to lighten their sombre gravity. But athwart the shafts of the sunlight shining through the crimson glamour, Gaspard seemed to see all the pageantry we picture of Druid worship. The procession of white-robed priests marched round the central altar, and the awe-struck, savage worshippers crouched around, while the sunset crimson was changed to flame and darkened with the smoke that arose from human sacrifice.

For a moment the vision was so real that Gaspard shuddered as if the cries of the victims indeed fell on his ear ; and he was glad to have his reverie interrupted by the minister's voice.

"Here in the centre," Mr. Traill was saying, "is the altar where sacrifice was performed, but where we have reason to believe happier scenes took place. You see this stone with the large hole in it? A man and a woman clasping each other's hands through this aperture and exchanging vows of fidelity, formed the marriage ceremony of this primitive people."

"You seem to be as well acquainted with their customs, sir, as if you had lived among them," observed Gaspard, who rather doubted the accuracy of the minister's information.

"This theory is no unfounded surmise," was the reply, "for the custom survived, under the name of the Troth of Odin, till very recent times. When I came to Stromness thirty years ago, it was very common among the poorer people; and indeed, under the marriage law that then existed in Scotland, the bond was perfectly lawful, though from the first I always insisted to my people that no wedding would be deemed true in God's sight which was not blessed by His Church."

"Priestcraft reigns here too," thought Gaspard, "and raises up barriers beyond those built by law. Why must it always make the path to heaven more difficult by inventing new sins where conscience never dreamed of them?" Aloud he asked: "Are such marriages, then, no longer valid?"

"No," replied Mr. Traill, with, it seemed to the younger man, a vindictive pleasure in the thought; "the law has been reformed, and I can assure my people that in man's sight, as well as in Heaven's, the tie is worthless. But," he added, in a tone of irritation, "it is wonderfully difficult to convince them of it. Only last year, a couple exchanged that troth-plight, and though I insisted on their being married again in a respectable manner, nothing will convince the young woman that she has been guilty of any sin."

"If both she and her lover hold the tie to be binding, I do not see why she should feel any guilt," protested the young man. "The essence of the marriage bond is mutual consent and permanence; if these two conditions be complied with, I do not see that the form of contract is of great importance."

"You are infected with the atheistical doctrines of your country," groaned the minister. "I know how lightly the marriage tie is regarded in France; but I

thank Heaven that here it is held in greater esteem."

Gaspard looked surprised, not knowing what he had said to justify such an accusation; but he merely shrugged his shoulders, and suggested that it was time to return to the town.

At the window of the Manse parlour they saw Thora sitting looking out for them. She was idle; she was always idle except when old Osla set her some household task to do. She had not the art of inventing work for herself, to fill up the long hours of the eventless day, as many women have who lead monotonous lives. Duties so made are unimportant enough, it is true, and seem silly and childish in their make-believe value, to those who share in the world's real work; but they are better a hundredfold than the ennui and discontent which seem to be the only substitutes for them. If Thora could have found an interest in needlework, or in that endless contest with Nature which is called gardening, had she had an eye to perceive the changeful beauty of the scenes around her, or the sad pathos of the lives of most of her guardian's flock, she might have found happiness, and been free from the endless craving for change that now wore out her youth. But she could see nothing that was not dreary in her present life, and thought that everywhere else there must be more of interest and variety.

She did not analyse her feelings so as to find this out, or perhaps she would have guessed that it was only the longing for novelty, the desire for new scenes and new people that drew her to Gaspard Harache, and made his company so precious to her. She only knew that she was happy when he was near her, talking to her, and unhappy when he was away. What interpretation but one could a girl of seventeen give to such a phenomenon? Older women than she have mistaken discontent for love.

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